

2/27/73

Dear Charles,

The inauthenticity in relation to myth for Levi-Strauss is not any falseness in the myth, as, with Stevens, "to say the solar chariot is junk," but rather the relations between people engendered by myth, or better totemism. You said once many years ago that the English department was run like a club. If we are the Hedgehogs, and the math department the Reindeer, then we are together merely because we are equidistant from Reindeer, not because we participate in hedgehogness, and we are shut off from Reindeer merely by their location in the logic of the distance between Hedgehog and Reindeer, not by any individual response. "Had he and I but met..." So, I take it, with the alienations of social/economic class. Myth for L.-S. is an abstract logic which uses concrete images to isolate or to incorporate according to the principles of the logic, not according to concrete actualities. It distorts attention. The relations in the logic of myth are imposed on human relations and override any authentic self and any authentic relations of that self to another.

This logic of myth which dictates inauthentic relations doesn't mean that fragments of myth can't decorate poems; but the more I teach that myth course, the more I see even incidental references to classical myths as clues to some more essential evasion. When Mailer used a vocabulary, as he does, of priest in relation to astronaut, and chalice, cathedral, shrine, miracle, even as I wish he had read Joyce's Araby and purged himself, I see or at least now say that these references lose the particular and its relations in the blur of the resemblance and its relations. When he calls von Braun "the head waiter of the largest hofbrau house in H eaven," he prevents any authentic relation. When he describes a woman-spectator, "our redneck Molly abloom in this encampment," his infatuation is with his wit in seeing the resemblance, not with her. So for all his assimilations of individual to class, when a man looks to Mailer like the night desk-clerk in a midwestern YMCA. "...as if the sun were not only the source of life, but the lion at the gates of life defending the bastions of its planets with a fierce tongue to lick the infected space between" (p.248). Obviously Stevens, "Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky/ Without evasion by a single metaphor."

The good/evil problem is more interesting to me because I detect an inauthenticity. We've known since Eliot how difficult it is to be good--"Sin grows with doing good"--and how contradictory it is to seek martyrdom. There is a sense, in spite of Plato, that one cannot choose to do or to be good without in the self-consciousness rendering the good inauthentic. I think Arendt tries to show this in The Human Condition. West demonstrates it in Miss Lonelyhearts whose attempt to do good turns to violence--breaking a chair over a man, socking a woman, etc; Miss L. is as violent as Sam Spade. I'm prepared to see these difficulties, and to accept that Huck Finn, when he says "All right, then, I'll go to hell," is "authentic" because he is being good without knowing it. But I think also that the contradictions inherent in the choice of good as such should be extended to the self-consciously wicked, and that the acceptance of anything like violence as authentication is sentimentality. The alternative to violence as the authentication of authenticity seems to be association with the authentic, as in workman's jeans on fine arts painter. Here is an ad in Rolling Stone: "On Dec 12, 1972, Jim Croce received a standing ovation at Madison Square Garden as he walked on to the stage. Two days later, in Philadelphia where Jim lives, a construction worker stopped him on the street to rap and tell him how much he enjoyed his songs. On September 17, 1972, Rolling Stone Magazine said, "(Jim)...Can write sensitively of experiences and images." About the same time the Philadelphia Chapter of the Sons of Italy Newsletter said that Jim Croce was a strong and authentic talent who was going places." Jim Croce's talent is in communicating with other human beings, regardless of their place in the scheme of things..." This is so patronizing and condescending, so dishonest, that I can't help thinking that giving up the explicit goal of authenticity might enable one to appear more as himself; because unless he stops using his authenticity to appear authentic, he will not appear so. That is, as in the use of the Philadelphia-Italian authenticity, the use of the authentic for any purpose invalidates its authenticity. Maybe I'm saying that maybe something can be authentic, but it can't prove it or use it without destroying itself.

The "theatricality" which I write against is a version of the inauthentic--nothing is what it seems--but the alternatives around mostly impress me as sentimental, the unearned authenticities of evil. Does Trilling mention sex? I am afraid of seeing Last Tango in Paris with its sexual simulations, because I still like to think of the sexual as something that can't be faked, an experience that detheatricalizes people; and I wonder (from the reviews) if there is a relation between the simulations of intercourse, and Brando's request that she cut her fingernails and insert her fingers in his ass. That is, if the intercourse is not authentic, must the next stage in the quest for authenticity be both passive for the man and lower (infantile?) in some hierarchy of intimate acts. Shit!

I don't think one can judge his own authenticity.

One other point has two parts: Trilling doesn't relate authenticity to methods of thought, yet there is ^I testimony that both metaphor and myth prevent ^A authenticity, and I use that in teaching, for instance to see Mailer using metaphor and myth in order to preclude authenticity, not to achieve it. The testimony on metaphor is from many places in Stevens, for example The Motive for Metaphor:

Where you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:
The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being, ...

The relation of myth and authenticity is stated by Levi-Strauss: "But non-authentic levels are on the increase: I mean all those ways in which actual people are cut off from each other or interconnected only through intermediary agents or a system of relays, such as administrative machinery or ideological ramifications... Myth is the most fundamental form of inauthenticity. I defined authenticity as the concrete nature of the knowledge people have of each other, and contrary to what might seem to be the case, there is nothing more abstract than myths." (Conversations with C.L.-S., G. Charbonnier, pp. 54-55). I think that a Sartrean response to this would be that it is L-S. who makes the myths abstract by his interpretations, and thereby drops out the concreteness--you'd have to read Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason if I have the title right. My point about Trilling is that he stays far away from how and why to think now about the problems--that the subject is crucial, but his handling of it an academic evasion.

What of his chronology? Isn't sincerity a secularization of religious faith? Aren't the anatomies of faith and doubt analyses of authenticity and inauthenticity? Criseide in Chaucer is guilty of bad faith; she lacks trothe. She manipulates other people into preserving her illusions of herself, and resembles no one else in literature so much as the woman in Sartre who "...leaves her hand there, but...does not notice that she is leaving it..." (Being and Nothingness, p. 55).

NOON (Solstice)
occupying space
0 | 0

Reading to Jenny
Jenny or Will sick -
the doctor coming

Cartw. has been
instinctively using
metaphor?
??

Cartwright
and Leahy
1. parallax

Sentimentality? A failure of feeling.
(W.Stevens)

"If there is one truth we, as moderns, hold to be self-evident, it is that nothing is what itx seems to be. The world one wakes to on the left side of the bed may not be the world one fell asleep from on the right. Another convenient rule of thumb is that everything conceals its opposite. So the thief is, in reality, solon disguised; the beggar an impoverished benefactor; the rapist, if we but knew him, an immoderately shy fellow; the cleric a collared sensualist; the metaphysician, a man of lofty thoughts and a short prick ... Such ... are doubtless descriptions of a comic universe ..."

(Dr. Obnobile Takes A Walk)

DUCK! yelled the man in the blind.
Ka-bocooooom. Looking up we saw snowily descending ...
Down for the Count! Marie smiled,
gathering the first tailfeathers in.

"At the corner of the next intersection two men are fighting; they collide, fly far apart, guardedly approach one another and are at once locked together in struggle again. "Stop fighting, gentlemen," I say."
(Kafka's Diaries, June 6, 1914)

What a strange way to be dead. Anyone would say you aren't. But, in fact, you're all dead.

You float nothingly behind that membrane, hanging from the highest to the lowest, which comes and goes from sundown to sundown, shaking in front of the echoing box of an injury that doesn't hurt. So I say life is in the mirror, and you're the original, death.

While the ripple goes, while the ripple comes, it's so safe to be dead. Only when the waters fall apart in front and keep on folding over, then you change yourselves completely and when you know that you're dying, you notice the sixth cord, and it's not yours anymore.

You're all dead, not having ever lived. Anyone would say that, not being now, you must have been in some other time. In fact, you're the corpses of a life that never was. It's a sad fate having been dead all the time, a dry leaf that's never green. Orphanhood of orphanhoods.

And yet the dead cannot be corpses from a life they have yet to live. They always died from living.

You're all dead.

Vallejo, Trilce, LXXV

This letter is such an anthology of quotations that I offer one more which I'd like to hear you and Trilling on. Don Juan speaks to Carlos Castaneda (not his real name, by the way):

"Do you think that you and I are equals?"

..."Of course we're equals," I said.

I was, naturally, being condescending. I felt very warm towards him even though at times I did not know what to do with him; yet I still held in the back of my mind, although I would never voice it, the belief that I, being a university student, a man of the sophisticated Western world, was superior to an Indian.

"No," he said calmly, "we are not."

"Why, certainly we are," I protested.

"No," he said in a soft voice. "We are not equals. I am a hunter and a warrior, and you are a pimp."

...

It was midnight when I finally realized that he could and would stay motionless there in that wilderness, in these rocks, perhaps forever if he had to. His world of precise acts and feelings and decisions was indeed superior.

I quietly touched his arm and tears flooded me.

Journey to Ixtlan pp. 81-82.

Charles I am puzzling over two ideas: one is that the standards for the proof of the authenticity of "evil" are less stringent than the standards of the authenticity of "good," and that perhaps some letting-up is necessary, or redefinition, lest we be stuck with de Sade, Genet, and endless self-scrutiny of authenticity which is just more evasive self-abuse and self self self, another excuse for introspection. What do you know about this? The other is the relations of authenticity and equality, the problems of authentic equality, but I won't start quoting Leibniz. Trilling's subject may be "magnificent," but I can't agree that the book is.

Please send to
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NOISE IN ST. : CAN RAISE VOICE : SING CHOIRING
Dark fine sandy run : / like those street singers

of you in Broadway Heights

} sometimes like yr hair, had
a cash ensemble

vid. in N.Y. - stalling, etc. - involving Ca. tonight:
will it make the English papers?

Americans who make
King. papers
prior to visit : exp. ident. with St. Andrews
the

into Jenny. first, on the table picture, v. stand
vs. STONES, new exhibition in L.
metaphor - acceptance -
transcendent windows.
FACT-TRUTH

later : - a man measuring diameter : 97 feet. etc.

SCENES FROM : keeps
→ Chinese, conveying of STONES - one each in BLUESTONE Henge
Journ away - good to be understood.
H sign. : how
then square with
Callanish - Stonehenge
formula in 13?